

AASHTO NEWS

American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials

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State, Industry Transportation Leaders Call on Congress to “Get It Done” on Reauthorization Legislation

Saying highway and transit projects – and the tens of thousands of jobs they provide – are being held up across the nation by the lack of a federal surface-transportation act, leaders of state transportation departments and several industry groups today called on Congress to “Get It Done!”

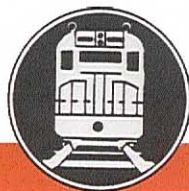
“The reauthorization measures should be introduced in January, marked up and passed by February, resolved by House and Senate conferees in March and on the President’s desk by April,” said John Horsley, Executive Director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) which represents the state departments of transportation in Washington, D.C.

The last six-year law that distributed federal Highway Trust Fund money and transit funds to the states expired Sept. 30, 2003, and Congress has enacted half a dozen temporary extensions to keep some funding flowing to the states.

Horsley was joined by four chief executives of AASHTO member transportation departments, raising issues now looming for all states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Speaking were DOT chiefs Director Gordon Proctor of Ohio, Secretary Allen Biehler of Pennsylvania, Executive Director John Njord of Utah, and Commissioner Phil Shucet of Virginia.

They stressed four points: in northerly states further delay might cause the loss of a construction season; delay is stalling creation of tens of thousands of jobs; states cannot prudently plan spending based on short-term extensions; and delay has exacerbated purchasing-power erosion – by millions of dollars – for state DOTs.

“It’s been nearly 16 months since we’ve had a reauthorization bill in place – and time is up,” said Pennsylvania DOT Secretary Allen Biehler. “America can’t wait another day for the green light for reauthorization and progress to tackle our mobility problems.”



Not only are commuters and other travelers facing slower relief, the CEOs said – but tens of thousands of jobs are going unfilled as projects are postponed, or scrapped.

“The U.S. Department of Transportation estimates that for every billion dollars in federal transportation funding spent, 47,500 direct and indirect jobs are created,” said Director Proctor of Ohio. “Based upon that figure, Ohio could expect between 75,000 and 150,000 new jobs with the passage of a long-term transportation authorization bill ... these are good-paying, stable jobs, the kind of jobs Ohio’s citizens want and need,” he said.

Although the current Congressional extension runs through May, many states can’t wait that long to plan their summer work.

“Our construction schedule follows the timetable of Mother Nature,” said Utah DOT Executive Director John Njord. “In Utah, we are limited to constructing projects between mid-April and mid-October ... outside of that window it’s simply too cold and too wet to do any work.”

And time is money, they agreed.

“Every day this drags on, our transportation dollars are worth less,” said Virginia DOT Commissioner Phil Shucet. “By the end of May, the six extensions (by Congress) ... will reduce the purchasing power of additional transportation dollars in Virginia by nearly \$50 million.”

Also lending their support to speedy passage of new surface-transportation legislation were President Pete Ruane of the American Road and Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA); Chief Executive Officer Stephen Sandherr of the Associated General Contractors (AGC); President William Millar of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA); President Greg Cohen of the American Highway Users’ Alliance; and Tim James, Director of Federal Relations for the International Union of Operating Engineers.

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